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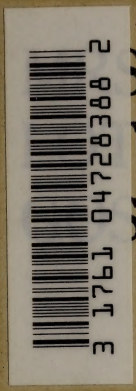

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Ernest Stafford

ALBERT E. S. SMYTHE

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Mrs. Lothbury's Gospel.

This circumstantial story may be regarded as having had its location inside the belt line. The most characteristic part of Toronto is still to be found on the square miles around which shake and rumble the ancient chariots of the belt. It began at Dr. Flanner's one morning at breakfast during the war. He was reading the paper and Mrs. Flanner made a remark.

"I beg your pardon, my dear?" he said, looking up from a war despatch.

"I needn't repeat it. You never attend to what I say," was the reply.

"I was eating this nice, crisp toast of yours, and when I eat crisp toast I can hear nothing but the noise of the reduction plant," explained the Doctor, who owned mining shares.

"Oh, rubbish. You never listen to me."

"Would it not be easier to repeat your observation than take all this time in refusing?"

"I have no patience with you."

"Well, that's intelligible, at any rate. But suppose you give me an-

other chance. I've finished the toast," he insinuated.

"I said I wished I could be of some help to somebody," was the yielding answer.

"Why didn't you go and see that girl I told you about? You have plenty to do in the house, I should think, but if you want a job she certainly would be no worse for a visitor."

"You mean that horrid girl that had the baby?"

"Yes; but you need not be so hard on her on that account. The baby died and she's not going to be long behind it. You are a good Christian, Bella, I'm sure, but good Christians have a way of falling short of their Master's example. Not much, you know, but a miss is as good as a mile. Would He have objected to visit her because she had a baby?"

"I'll go," declared Mrs. Flanner. "If she is going to die she ought to realize the danger to her soul. What's the matter with her?"

"I'm not quite sure. Heart action is bad. There is an anaemic condition. There is malnutrition. It is one of those cases we doctors do not care to discuss in public. I only know she can't live."

"How old is she "

"About twenty-two, I think."

"And what's her name?"

"She calls herself Julia Lemberg,

but I don't believe it's her own."

"Humph," was the comprehensive comment. "I'll go and see her."

"Better try the afternoon. Here's the address,' and he tore a slip from his prescription tablet.

Mrs. Flanner was far from revealing all that was in her mind to her husband. She had qualified for one of W. A. Fraser's silver crosses as a bereaved mother, in the previous year, when Willie, their only boy, had gone west somewhere in France. Mrs. Flanner had the fortitude of the average Christian, but she had the heart of the average mother, and while she stoically bore her grief, she hungered for knowledge, for light, for sympathy. She read "Raymond" and her husband joked her about it, and told her he expected to hear of her turning Theosophist. He was astonished at the storm this raised. Mrs. Flanner would infinitely have preferred to be classed with atheists. She understood that Thomas Paine and Col. Ingersoll were comparatively respectable people, beside these dreadful people who said all religions were the same, when everyone should know that there was only one real religion, the one into which Mrs. Flanner had been providentially born.

Mrs. Flanner rang the bell at the door of a not very modern house in a short and narrow street well up towards Bloor, and when the door

opened a kindly-faced, but somewhat flabby matron looked at her enquiringly.

"I came to see Julia Lemberg," she began, somewhat aggressively.

"She has not been seeing visitors," was the obstructive reply.

"I am Mrs. Flanner, Dr. Flanner's wife," appealed the visitor.

"That makes a difference," she was told. "Dr. Flanner is kindness itself. It is a pleasure to see him," and with this mollifying admission, she ushered the visitor into the sitting-room. "If you will wait a minute till I see how she is I'll take you up. She falls into a sort of a dwalm now and then and I don't like to disturb her."

Mrs. Flanner waited and looked around her. There were several little books lying on a table. She lifted one and opened it. A marked passage read:

"Before the soul can stand in the presence of the Masters its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart." She read it twice, and a shiver passed over her. She laid the little book down and lifted another. It also was thumbed and marked She read again:

"Of teachers there are many; the Master-Soul is one. Alaya, the Universal Soul. Live in that Master as Its ray in thee. Live in thy fellows as they live in It."

"What strange doctrine is this?" she thought. She did not like it, but she felt she could not repudiate it. There was something that echoed in her mind and yet eluded her. She laid the book down and lifted another ragged little volume. It was a New Testament in the revised version. She opened it and found it also marked and scored, an where it opened she read: "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or There! for lo, the Kingdom of God is within you!" What kind of religion did people have who read books like these? she asked herself, and as she pondered the door opened and Mrs. Lothbury invited her to go upstairs.

She found a young girl propped up by pillows in bed, an old-fashioned patch-work quilt looking solid and earthly in contrast with the frailty of the features and complexion of the face that she saw turned to her. Dark and beautiful eyes glowed out of the transparent pallor it presented. She held out her hand, and the girl put out her thin fingers. Mrs. Flanner was embarrassed. She had come prepared to admonish and convert if possible a flagrant sinner. Somehow she felt admonished herself, although not a word had been spoken.

"I see very few people, and it is very kind of you to come," said the

girl in rich but quiet tones. Mrs. Flanner wished she had brought some flowers or fruit. She began to feel embarrassed, and a memory of the Pharisee and the publican flashed across her mind.

"I am not sure that I will be welcome, and I thought if I could do you any good—," she began, but broke off lamely.

"You are very welcome, but I'm afraid"—with a rare smile—"that I'm like that man in Jacob's story, "I don't want good done to me. Perhaps I'm too independent," and she lifted long lashes towards Mrs. Flanner.

"But don't you think we ought to desire to have good done to us?" said Mrs. Flanner, feeling that she had come to firm ground.

"No, I have always been wanting to do good to other people," was the reply. "It seems so much nicer to be giving than to be getting." Mrs. Flanner felt she was getting on quicksand again.

"But you know, my dear"—she wondered why she said, "my dear"—"that God gives us everything, and we should be grateful and humble before Him."

"Do you think He gives us everything, or do we not take what we want?"

"Mrs. Flanner was puzzled. "Perhaps we choose among the abun-

dance of His gifts, but we owe all to Him," she said at length.

"Do you really think so? I have wondered if we should not confine ourselves to giving and take as little as possible. The Golden Rule says to do unto others as you would be done by. That has always seemed to shut me up to giving."

"You would like your gifts to be accepted, so you must be willing to accept in turn." Mrs. Flanner felt she had made a point.

"If I make foolish gifts it would be well to have them refused." Mrs. Flanner felt that her point had escaped. "And yet when foolish gifts are offered me I hate to offend by refusing." Mrs. Flanner felt that the quicksands were engulfing her.

"I am sure, Mrs. Flanner, you have had so much experience in the world that you could advise me about that. I feel like a child, although I am twenty-two, and life has been very hard."

"Perhaps you made it hard," said Mrs. Flanner, and immediately felt that she had struck a bitter blow as she saw the hurt look in the girl's eyes.

"I tried to do the best I could for everybody," said the girl. "I never had my father or mother that I remember, and my aunt was glad to have me leave her when I was able to support myself. I was a steno-

grapher, you know. It seems rather silly, to think that God made me to be a stenographer and have a baby and then to die, don't you think?" Dr. Flanner says I'm going to get better, but I know he does not feel that way."

Mrs. Flanner felt that an opening had been made for her ministrations. Here was an ignorant and rebellious soul, for all her pretty ways. Mrs. Flanner had felt compelled to admit their charm.

"My dear girl, I hope you will recover, but we should always be prepared for whatever may happen, and if God should will to—to—"to take you to Himself," she was going to say, but felt that this might be admitting too much, and continued—"to take you from this life you should be ready for the change. You know the story of the ten virgins, five of whom were wise and five were foolish. The foolish virgins neglected to get oil for their lamps. They may have given it away instead of being careful. The wise virgins were prepared and would not part with their store, and when the foolish virgins went to buy oil the bridegroom came and they were shut out. Do you want to be a wise or a foolish virgin?" she asked impressively.

"Oh, I'm wise all right. Willie took care of that?"

"And who is Willie?" asked Miss Flanner, somewhat shocked.

"I thought—I thought you knew," said the girl, looking at her curiously. "He was my friend," she added. Then, as seeking to change the subject, "The wise virgins did not seem very generous, did they? Perhaps they belonged to the oil trust of that day."

"I don't think you should speak so of sacred things, censored Mrs. Flanner.

"But is the story sacred?" countered the girl. "I can understand the moral or the teaching or the the truth, whatever it is, that it is meant to tell as being sacred, but no one seems quite clear what the truth is. What do you think it is?"

Mrs. Flanner did not like the question direct, but felt she must face it. "I think it means that we must be ready when the bridgroom comes," she stated.

"Yes, but what does the bridegroom mean and what is the oil, and what do the foolish virgins do afterwards? Mrs Lothbury says there are always wise and foolish in the world, and the wise are ready for any call that comes and can take advantage of all the opportunities of evolution, and pass on to higher stages, but the foolish who are not ready, have to go about their neglected business, and when they die instead of staying with the bridegroom in heaven or a place like heaven she calls by another name, they have to come back and be born again on earth

and learn to be wise. What do you thing of that idea?"

"I have never thought about it. Is Mrs. Lothbury a Theosophist?"

"She say she would like to be, but doesn't thing she is good enough. She is a heart of gold. She took me in when nobody else would look at me, and she is kindness itself. She says it isn't everybody that calls Lord, Lord, that gets to heaven, but only the ones that do the will of the Lord. Is that right?"

Mrs. Flanner was appalled. Here, she felt, was the devil quoting scripture for his own ends and she had no conclusive answer ready.

"Of course our conduct must correspond with our beliefs," she said, "but we have no authority for supposing that once the door is shut it will ever be opened again."

"But why should God have a door, at all if He is going to keep it shut all the time?" persisted the girl. Mrs. Lothbury says that God's doors never open backwards. Whatever happens it helps us forward, and even the evil we do if the intention is right, takes us further along by teaching us what not to do another time. If God treats us as a father does his children that seems reasonable. A father might punish us but he would not lock us up forever.

"You see, Mrs. Flanner," she went on, "I made a serious mistake, but it was done in ignorance, and I'm sure

my friend meant no harm by me. He was killed at the front, or I'm sure he would have married me. I'd like to think he had another chance. Wouldn't you?" she asked, again with a curious look.

"I am sure there is no hope for anyone without serious repentance and entire faith in the blood of Jesus that cleanses from all sins," replied Mrs. Flanner, feeling herself on safe ground once more. "I lost a son, a very dear gallant, noble fellow, in the war, and I feel that he is safe in the arms of Jesus. The chaplain wrote me such a nice letter telling me how he had listened to him and was ready to go and happy."

"I had a letter from the chaplain, too. Of course Willie would not sayanything to him, but he told the chaplain to tell me that he only regretted one thing, that we had not been married."

"And why hadn't you?"

"Willie was a student and could not marry me just then. His parents would not have liked it. His battalion was ordered away suddenly, and he came to see me the night before they left. You don't know what it was to have him go away like that. I could not bear to let him go, and he had to go to his parents after that. It was terrible—it was terrible," the girl said, the tears welling into her eyes. "I didn't know what I was doing. Can you understand? He was going away to die. I was mad."

Mrs. Flanner was at a loss. She felt that she should deliver a homily on sin, but it did not seem appropriate, and she could not make up her mind how to begin. Finally she said.

"The war has been very dreadful."

"I have found the whole of my life very dreadful," said the girl simply. Mrs. Flanner looked at h er.

"Surely you desire to be at peace, then, and to accept the pardon so freely given, and to enter into the joy so freely bestowed?"

"Oh, Mrs. Flanner, I hope you won't think me strange, but I do not think I could ever be at peace and know what is going on here all the time. How can one have joy and know of all the misery here? I want to be pardoned and I am sure God, and Jesus, even more would pardon me, if they knew what I thought. But pardon does not change things, Mrs. Lothbury says, nor pay any debts, and the people we owe debts to must be paid."

"But all sins are wiped out if you believe," advised Mrs. Flanner.

"Mrs. Lothbury says that is what the people in the parable thought, and they were sent away into eternal fire. She says it is not believing, but doing, that counts, and she says it was only those who served Christ in practical ways, in the persons of the least of his brethren who were given eternal life. I have done so little good, and have

found so little to believe that is reasonable, I wonder what you think?"

"I think you should see a clergyman," Mrs. Flanner said suddenly, cutting the Gordian knot at a stroke, as she imagined.

"I have seen one," was the reply. "He was very nice and kind, and prayed out of the prayerbook, and said I must leave it all to Christ. Surely Christ expects something more of us than that? I always feel that we should do something in return. That makes it reasonable to me that we should come back, as Mrs. Lothbury says, and try to repair our mistakes. Experience teaches, she says, and we shall be wiser each time. What do you think?"

"I have never thought about it. I am satisfied to be taken to my Saviour and to enter into His joy forever."

"But if you could not be happy without some you love being there would you not rather come back to earth to be with him?"

"I know all my dear ones are with Jesus, and I expect to be with them," was Mrs. Flanner's devout answer.

For a while the girl said nothing. Then she spoke slowly.

"The clergyman who came said that we could not expect to be freely pardoned unless we made a full confession to all concerned in our sins. Do you think that is so?" she asked.

"I cannot say, but no doubt he was right."

"But if such a confession brought sorrow and pain to others should it be made?"

"That depends. I don't think it is right to conceal anything from anyone who would be vitally affected by what he would hear. We need not be afraid of the truth."

"Oh, Mrs. Flanner, I wonder!" exclaimed the girl with great earnestness. "I wish you had not come, but I am glad you are here. I do not know what to do, but if you think we should confess all I am not afraid. I thought you knew or I would not have seen you."

"Knew what? " asked Mrs. Flanner.

"Knew about me," was the reply.

"Yes, but what about you? What has your confession to do with me?"

"Everything, everything. I never felt such a wicked sinner before. I thought the doctor had told you. Oh, you had better go away and never see me again!"

"What is the matter, my dear," and the motherly instincts of Mrs. Flanner led her to put an arm round the girl's shoulders. She was afraid that her strength was being overtaxed. "Never mind telling me, whatever it is. Matters cannot be mended now, and I am not curious." She thought the girl needed to be humoured.

"I must tell you. I should have told you long ago. He wanted me to. But

I could not bear it. And now you have come I must."

"I don't understand at all," said Mrs. Flanner. "What is it you wish to tell me."

"I'll show you his letter," was the sobbing reply. She turned feebly and put her hand under the pillow, and drew out an envelope. Taking a letter from it she handed it to Mrs. Flanner.

"O my God!" escaped her lips and her face turned suddenly white as she looked at the girl, and again at the letter.

This is what she read:

"My darling Jo. What can I say and what can I do? I am writing to father, and I want you to go to mother at once. She is the dearest of women, and for your own sake when she knows you, as well as for mine, she will be a mother to you. As soon as I can get furlough I will come home and we will be married, but nobody need know the difference in the meantime. I was mad that night, but I was not myself. I had been having supper, you know, with the boys. I never drank wine before, but they persuaded me for a farewell, and I must have lost my head. It is a poor excuse, and I can never forgive myself, and I don't know how you can—.

"I must stop. The Boches have started something and I have to go.

My whole heart's love to you' dearest.
"Willie."

When she had read the letter twice she looked at the girl who silently handed her another sheet of paper. There were a few shaky words on it.

"Darling, darling, I am not to see you any more. Forgive me, God bless you. Good-bye. Will."

Another hand had added the date, ten days later than the first, with the words. "Lieut. Flanner died half an hour after writing this," with the signature of a field hospital official.

Mrs. Flanner burst into uncontrollable weeping and sobbing and threw herself on her knees beside the bed. Very soon the door opened and Mrs. Lothbury entered.

"You'll be coming downstairs with me for a little while," she said. "It wouldn't be good for Miss Julia here to be excited too much. Come now," and she assisted the weeping woman to her feet. Downstairs she made Mrs. Flanner sit down.

"I'll just be getting you a cup of tea. There's nothing like a cup of tea to occupy the body with its own comfort and leave the mind free, and you need a clear head to see what's before you." She had a cup of tea ready in a few minutes, and persuaded Mrs. Flanner to drink it.

"Just sit a minute till I run up and see how Miss Julia is." And when she returned she found Mrs. Flanner

wiping her eyes and the tea cup empty.

"How can God allow such things?" was Mrs. Flanner's first coherent remark.

"And why for not? If He is to leave us our free will we must do what we please. And if we do what we please why should we blame the Almighty? I was brought up, Mrs. Flanner, in the strictest belief of predestination, and all the ministers argued it out plain that everything was foreordained. And it sounds fine till ye have some trouble like this with your boy and this girl. I have had troubles of my own in my time, and they never were either that bad or that reasonable that I could feel I needed to bring God into the explanation."

"Don't you believe God orders our lives?"

"If He did I believe in Him that much I think they would be more credit to Him. He gives us laws to abide by and opportunities to serve, and we disregard the one and misuse the other, and that's what makes a puzzle of life. I still believe things are predestinated for us, but it is no God outside ourselves that does it. You'll have mind of what St. John says in his Gospel about the Word being in the beginning, and that the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and that the Word was

made Flesh. I think the whole mystery is there. The word is in ourselves, in our own hearts and mouths, as St. Paul says. Maybe you'll not understand it at first, but if the Word is in us like that it is the Word of truth and justice and right, and whatever we do with that in our hearts we have to stand by it. I think that's what the Lord meant when He said whatever measure we meted, it would be measured to us, and St. Paul has the same view, whatever you sow you reap. It is the Word that justifies us, and that means putting us right. My husband is a printer and he told me that justifying was just to set straight. But maybe you'll think I'm talking havers."

"Oh, no. But I don't see what that has to do with predestination?" was Mrs. Flanner's enquiry.

"Well, to me it's simple. We have to have free will and do as we please, or we'd be no more than moving wax dolls. Then when we have exercized our own free will we must abide by the consequences. I don't see else how justice could be done. But maybe you"ll no have heard about reincarnation—about having lived before, and gradually growing wiser and better as we go on?"

Mrs. Flanner had heard something of it, but treated it as a heathen superstition, she said.

"Well, I was of that mind myself when first I heard of it, but I had mind after awhile of what the Lord said that no man could ascend to heaven but Him that descended from heaven. And we believe the Lord came down and was born like the rest of us. All he did was by way of setting us an example and showing us the way, and I found a lot about it in the Bible. He told us that John the Baptist was Elijah come back."

"You don't think He meant that Elijah really was born again as John the Baptist?"

"What else can I think?" He evidently foresaw that a lot of people wouldnt believe it, for He said if you are willing to receive it John was Elijah. Maybe you'll no be willing to receive it?"

"It's so strange I hardly know what to think," Mrs. Flanner replied.

"The truth is always strange. You have been bearing strange things this day, Mrs. Flanner, and maybe the Lord means that your heart and your mind will be opened together. I'm presuming in saying so much, maybe, but I have taken a notion to that lassie upstairs, and if I could not see the hand of God in what has happened to her I couldn't be at peace. She's sick, and you have visited her, but have you come in the spirit and with the heart of Him who would have

us see Himself in the least of His brethren? It must have been a sore wrench for you to hear of that laddie away there in France, but think what it is to her. And her bit infant's been taken, too. Nothing but death about us, these days, I'm thinking. But where the Lord is there is no death, and that's what we'll be forgetting most of the time. We pass through death to life and through both to life again, and we are to have life more abundantly. They say the Lord could not have borne all the miseries of earth if He had fair remembered all the glories of Heaven, and so He was emptied of His glory. Isn't it a blessed providence that we are emptied of all the memories that belong on the other side of the gate of birth."

"Where do you get all these ideas?" asked Mrs. Flanner.

"Some of them came to me, and the Bible gives me a lot. Forby that, I go to a meeting where they tell you more than you could carry away easy. But there's not many ready to listen, and if it had not been the sorrow on you I would'nt have dared to tell it even to you. But it's such a comfort to know that we're all one flock and one shepherd, and if there's a stray one it'll be fetched back to the fold. We have all been bound together in the bundle of lives."

"What does Julia know of all this?" asked Mrs. Flanner.

"Not so much. But she feels there's a tie as strong as death between your laddie and her, and whether beyond the grave or in a new life when they are born again on earth they won't lose sight of each other. I do think there's a debt between them and it must be discharged. She's an honest girl and pure at heart. He never would have got the better of her but for that. And for his sake, if you'll excuse me saying so, I think you owe her something. I mean in the way of kindliness," added Mrs. Lothbury, afraid of being misunderstood.

"I'll go up and say good-bye to her," said Mrs. Flanner, which she accordingly did. She kissed the girl, who flushed and her eyes brightened with pleasure.

"My dear, I'll come and see you soon, but I must see my husband first."

"It was very good of you to come. Try not to think hardly of me," Julia pleaded.

"Do not be afraid. Mrs. Lothbury has been giving me some new ideas. We are never too old to learn." She kissed her again and left her. Downstairs Mrs. Lothbury took her by the hand.

"Go and talk it over with your man. He's a good one, and you can depend on him. And here's a wee

card for you, if you don't mind." They shook hands, and Mrs. Flanner departed.

In the street car she read the card.

Thou canst create this "day" thy chances for thy "morrow." In the "Great Journey" causes sown each hour bear each its harvest of effects. for rigid Justice rules the World. With mighty sweep of never-erring action, it brings to mortal lives of weal or woe, the Karmic progeny of all our former thoughts and deeds.

Mrs. Flanner was a woman of fine possibilities as indeed all women are, but she had been reared in a conventional mould, and her conception of duty; regulated by the commonplace standards about her, governed her life to the exclusion of higher aspects of duty of which she but rarely caught a glimpse. It is astonishing how the use and wont of commonplace dull the edge of the sword of the spirit. An artificial standard in life begets a new interpretation for the most sacred mysteries and robs them of their truth. It was perfectly right to forgive a prodigal son. She had had that thought built into her consciousness ever since she had attended Sunday School. But a prodigal daughter was another thing altogether, and another woman's daughter at that. It was her son, unbelievable as it might seem, who had proven prodigal, and this

girl, that she had called horrid, and looked like a saint or a martyr, was his victim. Must she be forgiven, too? This was a heart-searching question. Could she forgive her? Could she be at peace if she failed to forgive her? What was the old petition, and had she ever understood it? Mrs. Lothbury's talk had set strange ideas moving in her mind. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." Did that mean there was no forgiveness for herself unless she forgave all others in her turn? Was there a bargain involved in the prayer—a covenant, as the old word was? Did God make covenants with people? Apparently He did. If one prayed the Lord's prayer one agreed to the covenant. Whatsoever measure you mete it shall be measured unto you. As you sow you shall surely reap. That, then was what Mrs. Lothbury meant.

If she was reaping this harvest of sorrow and shame she must have sown it, some time, some where, but when and where? Had she ever brought shame and sorrow on anyone? She thought of her own immaculate dutiful life and could see no flaw in it to warrant such a trial. Could it be possible that she had lived before and brought shame and sorrow on some one else? She remembered as a girl how wilful and wayward she had been, and how of-

ten something had held her back or turned her aside from yielding assent or consent when certain enticements had been laid before her. Why had she had these inner promptings while others had them not, or disregarded them? Conscience? But what was conscience? Was it possible that it could be the experience of earlier lives? If it were so it would leave us our free will, and yet bring good fruit out of our folly. Was this the true doctrine of predestination, after all? She had a little superstition like all those who worship by form, and taking up the Testament on her dressing table she opened it at random. Her eyes fell on the words:

"Full well ye reject the Commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." This, then, was what she had been living for—her own tradition. She had not heard, had not known, had not heeded the Commandment of God. That Commandment was the Word in her own heart and mouth. She had missed the life and spirit of true religion by depending on the forms. Suddenly she felt that the sun was shining. The gardens of the world seemed to have burst into blossom. She remembered "The Bluebird." That was the truth and it had made no impression on her. There is no death. How could she rejoice in all this sorrow?

Yet she felt that the finger of Joy had touched her heart. What was this new radiance that shone down the street? It was more than an early winter sunset. "For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory," she whispered to herself.

"I must see John," she thought, and she left a message in the surgery that she wanted to see him as soon as he came in. It made her think of twenty years before as she scribbled it. "John, dear, I must see you at once." She hesitated about the signature. "Bella" was someone she wished to forget. She recalled the tenderness of twenty years ago and added, "Wee Wifie." When Dr. Flanner came in an hour later he found her kneeling beside her bed.

"O John, dear!" she cried as she rose and flung her arms about him. "I have been a wicked, foolish, selfish woman," and she laid her head on his heart and sobbed.

"Don't take on now, woman dear," said Dr. Flanner. "You have only uncovered a new seam in your knowledge of yourself. We are all a great deal worse and a great deal better than we think. Bella, dear, I know the goodness in you when you give it a chance. You have had a frightful time ever since Willie went to the front, and you must let me help you more to bear up. These are not times when we should worry too much

about ourselves, or whether we are good or bad. The thing is to get the needful thing done. You don't suppose all those heroes at the front are angels, but they are doing angels' work. None of us are saints, but we can make a shape at filling the place of the saints that may come along later. The world is always preparing for something better," he continued, as his wife quietly sobbed in his arms, "and if it wasn't for this constant hope and expectation of something better we couldn't carry on. The only place we can find something better is in ourselves, and when we discover this, and realize what we have overlooked in our own possibilities, that is what stings. But it should not worry you, my dear. The good is in you just as much as ever it was. You have only found out that it needs more play. There is nothing to grieve over in that.

"I have missed such a lot of chances, John. I can never forgive myself about Willie. If I had helped him more it would have been different."

"We don't know that, my dear. We may think it would, but we cannot tell. What is done is done. You know Tennyson's line, 'And that which I have done, may He within Himself make perfect.' Without Him we do nothing. He has a hand in all that happens. That is my faith. Most people leave God out of every-

thing except church, and that is what has made a Godless world: It is because you have come to see this that you are reproaching yourself. Dearest, there is no need. He knows and understands."

"John, I didn't think you were so religious."

"I hope I'm not religious. That is the last thing a man should be. I don't believe God is in the least religious. I know Jesus wasn't. He abused the religious people of His day till they were scandalized. He told his disciples they would be put out of the synagogues. They are put out of the churches today. What did you think of Mrs. Lothbury.

"I think she is wonderful, John. She told me such strange things. Do you think they are true?"

"I don't know. I can't stay. I'm not sure that anything is wholly true. But she has something that makes her strong and able to help a lot of people. What did she tell you?"

"She told me we had lived before and would live again, and that we were responsible for all that happens to us."

"It isn't unreasonable, at any rate. But the important thing is that we are alive now, and the standard of duty for an honest man or woman is just the same whether we lived before or lives again or not. If you knew you lived before it might

strengthen your purpose to do your duty, but your duty would be exactly the same whether you knew or not. We don't know what electricity is, but if we did it would not make any difference to the motorman. He would have to turn his handle just the same."

"But does it not clear up a lot of things if we lived before?"

"No doubt. It satisfies our intellectual curiosity, and explains many otherwise insoluble problems, but it does not change the eternal standards. Perhaps that's the reason so little is made of it in the New Testament. After what Prof. McTaggart says nobody can deny the probability that we lived before, but it is no more wonderful than that we are living now. It all comes down to that. Are we living the best life we know of at the present moment?"

"That makes it a terrible idea, John?"

"All life is terrible—terrible as an army with banners. But do not forget that He has His hand in it."

"What should I do, John?"

"You must settle that for yourself, Bella."

"Won't you help me?" she pleaded.

"Of course I will. What I mean is you must make up your own mind as to what you think is right. If I told you what to do and you did that, whether right or wrong, you would

have taken my hand instead of His. We must reach out and find His hand and follow it. Then, as Longfellow says, we are strengthened."

"John, did you know about Julia?"

"Yes, dear; I did. Her name is not Julia, but Josephine Lee. She changed it and hid herself in her trouble when she heard of Willie's death, and Mrs. Lothbury found her and got her story and came to me. You must forgive me, dear, for not telling you, but you were so upset over Willie's death and you had so many prejudices—I'm not blaming you, Bella; we are all loaded down with them—I thought it better to wait till you heard in some casual way. I felt it would come right somehow and when you were ready. You were not sorry you went to see the girl?"

"No, indeed. I couldn't help liking her. And Willie loved her, and she loves Willie. I'd like to bring her here."

"I don't know whether she would want to come. She isn't long for this world either, and to move her would do her no good. Mrs. Lothbury is very kind to her, and Jo likes to talk to her. She wants to know what's ahead of her, and she thinks Mrs. Lothbury can tell her."

"And can she?"

"That's not for me to say. Mrs. Lothbury is a very wonderful woman. I have only known a few like her. Holy Ann was one, and Mrs. Mendon

was another. She is a very sensible woman, and what she says is always practical. But she says herself it is not what one says but what he does that counts. She goes about doing good. Her life is a prayer. She works on earth as though there were no heaven. She longs for heaven as though there were no earth. You would never dream that such an ordinary looking woman could be so alive with wisdom."

"You never told me about her before."

"She doesn't like to be talked about. And besides, you could not have understood unless you had met her. You would hardly believe the things I could tell you about her. You have heard of the second sight that they tell of in Scotland. If you can believe it she has that. What that means in all its phases I would not undertake to say, but she can diagnose a case better than any man I know in the profession, and the veil we talk of between this world and the next seems to be no barrier to her. Of course, I am telling you this privately. I would be accused of rank superstition if I said so in public."

"I think, John, I never knew you before. I certainly never knew you like this. Why have you never talked to me of these things?"

"You were not ready, dear. A lot of things have happened to you today.

Our thoughts and our thinking have crises like a fever, I believe, and our minds under the influence of circumstances are more open at one time than at others. It needs great shocks to hammer open the door of our hearts sometimes. The war has done that for a lot of people. But for Willie you would not be ready to talk of these things now. We have to be plowed and harrowed a long time before the good seed can find soil to grow in. But I don't want you to worry over these matters. If you cannot be at peace in your mind then you have come to them too soon."

"I am strangely at peace, John. I never knew before what it was to lean on God, or to feel the strength of the everlasting arms beneath. That is the idea I got of Mrs. Lothbury's unchangeable law, the rigid justice that rules the world. We can depend on that and rest in it. Will you think this strange, John, that I began to wonder if it were not better that Willie died in France than to come back to be a dishonored father. It's a terrible thing to find our own selfishness cropping up at every turn. I don't know what you must have thought of me for years past."

"It must have been my fault too. People begin to drift apart before they know it, and gradually great barriers rise between them. But as long as there is love there is no fear. A mood

may last for years, but it will change at the end. Death or trouble or sorrow of some kind bridges the gap. It is part of our free will that we drift, I suppose, but the old invisible ties never break."

"I know; I know. There is no one like you, John. I've known it all along."

"It has taken the tragedy of the war, and much sorrow and this shock today to lift us up to the old heights. Please God, we'll try and take the hills and the valleys together after this."

A tap at the door came from a maid with a message that there was a person waiting to see Mrs. Flanner and it was very important.

"You go, dear," she said. Presently the Doctor returned.

"It's Mrs. Lothbury. You'd better come down. She has sorrowful news."

"Not Julia? Oh, bring her up here," exclaimed Mrs. Flanner.

Mrs. Lothbury was shown in. She had to answer Mrs. Flanner's rapid questioning.

"Yes, ma'am. It's all over. She must have been a bit excited or overstrained, but she was eager to go anyway. No, don't blame yourself. I believe it was more that she felt perfectly satisfied after seeing you that she had finished with things here. For a while, anyway, for we never get finished till Kingdom Come. She wanted

a rest, and she needed it. She went out as peaceful as a summer evening. I have seen many's the one pass out, but never one with more joy. And he was there to meet her—your son, I mean. Oh, Mrs. Flanner, there is no sting in death nor victory for the grave. Here we are in outer darkness, but there it is all light and peace for them that love the light."

"And are they in heaven now?" asked Mrs. Flanner. "I did so want to send a message to Willie."

"Heaven is far beyond where they are. Heaven comes later. In the Father's realm are many stages. That's the real meaning of that text about the many mansions. They are where they are fit to be. They will be back on earth before a great while, likely before you pass over. But the love you bear to each other will bind you wherever you be. The best part of us is outside these bodies of ours and our brains altogether. That better part of us, if we could bring ourselves to choose it, would be in communion always with those we love. In these bodies of flesh we are tied to things of earth. Those two are in the psychic world now in psychic bodies. We use our psychic bodies every night when we sleep, and can meet them that way, although we may not be able to remember it. To enter heaven we must have the new birth and pos-

sess our spiritual bodies. It is in the spiritual body that we learn wisdom from the Master."

"Are Willie and Julia happy?" asked Mrs. Flanner.

"Perfectly happy. But their happiness depends on things that perish, and as they change the old desires move in them and bring them back to the earth. But their New Year is bright and happy with all the hope and joy of love. When they come back to work out the old puzzles they will have more wit and more judgment. Heaven is for them that sacrifice, and they are not ready for sacrifice yet. Your son gave his life in a good cause, and it will be great gain to him, but your man here is giving his life every day, and the good law sees that the reward is equal to the sacrifice.

"Now I must run back to the house and see to things. I came over to tell the Doctor so that everything would be correct. And I wanted to see you. Don't let your heart be sore. There are no sorrows that we don't make for ourselves. The water of life is always springing in our own hearts. It's the Master that says, Come, to every thirsty soul."